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Title Slide: Introduction to SASS Data

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This module introduces users to the Schools and Staffing Survey, or SASS for short. It provides users with basic information about the study's target population, sample and study design, and data collection rounds, topics, sources, and methods.

The module also provides a broad overview of the topics for which data are available for analysis to help you answer the fundamental question: "Are SASS data for me?" The subsequent SASS training modules contained within this system will discuss some of these topics in greater detail and address questions about how to effectively use the dataset for your analytic purposes.

Though a variety of historical SASS data are available for analysis, these modules focus on those of 2011. Details regarding how to access earlier administrations of SASS are discussed in subsequent SASS modules.

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SASS is a system of related survey components or questionnaires that provide descriptive data on the context of public and private elementary and secondary education across the nation. SASS is a nationally representative cross-sectional study with schools as the primary sampling unit.

SASS is designed as a nationally representative cross-sectional periodic survey system. Let's take those terms one at a time. Because of its sample design, SASS collects data from both public and private schools, making it nationally-representative of schools in the United States. SASS is also designed to be state-representative for traditional public schools, and nationally-representative of public charter schools and of private schools by affiliation. Traditional public schools are authorized by school districts, while public charter schools may be independent of school districts or are authorized by a school district.

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SASS is cross-sectional in that it is collected from a probability-based sample of schools that is drawn independently each collection; and periodic, in that SASS data were collected every four years from 1999-2000 to 2011-12. SASS is a "survey system" in that it is comprised of multiple components and questionnaires. Data collected through the SASS system cover a wide range of topics including teacher demand, teacher and principal characteristics, general conditions in schools, principals' and teachers' perceptions of school climate and problems in their schools, teacher compensation, district hiring and retention practices, and basic characteristics of the student population.

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SASS was designed from its inception to have a one-year teacher follow-up, the Teacher Follow-up Survey (or TFS), in order to measure what proportion of teachers move from school to school or leave teaching. At a later point, the Principal Follow-up Survey (or PFS) was also added. Both of these and the related Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (or BTLS) be discussed in the module titled, "Follow-up Surveys to SASS"

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A summary of the overall timeline for SASS is shown here. As you can see, the first SASS was conducted in the 1987-88 school year. The first three data collections for SASS were collected every three years. There was a six-year pause in the data collection cycle while SASS was redesigned. The purpose of the survey redesign was to update survey content but also to examine the survey cycle. In the redesign, the decision was made to collect SASS data on a four-year cycle from 1999-2000 forward. In 2015, SASS will undergo a second re-design in which the content will be updated and the survey cycle will be shortened to collection every two years.

Data are collected through SASS using five types of questionnaires: the district questionnaire, school questionnaire, principal questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, and library media center questionnaire. More detailed information regarding each of the questionnaires will be presented in the module titled, "Data Collected Through SASS." These five levels of education providers are also referred to as the components of SASS.

Though these training modules will focus exclusively on 2011-12 SASS, all of the SASS data collection instruments can be accessed by clicking the underlined screen text, 'SASS Components and Data Collections.'

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In SASS, the school is the primary sampling unit. The primary sampling unit for any survey determines how the sample is drawn; in SASS, schools are sampled before any other education provider.

When a school is sampled for participation in SASS, the school's principal or school head is also sampled, and the roster of teachers is collected so that a random sample of teachers can be selected. For public schools, the school district associated with the school is pulled into sample, and the school library media center is also selected.

Teachers were scientifically sampled from sampled schools to participate in SASS. Teachers who were sampled from the school rosters were invited to complete surveys. Teachers were selected to ensure a proportional distribution of these characteristics by general teaching field, full or part-time teaching status, and years of teaching experience. The teacher workforce was sufficiently diverse across race and ethnicity so that oversampling on these characteristics was not deemed necessary for 2011-12 data

collection. A small proportion of a sampled school's teachers were selected within each sampled school, but not in sufficient numbers to be representative of within-school factors.

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The school questionnaire gathers most of the factual information about the school and its staff. Principals and teachers have separate questionnaires to collect information about their individual preparation, current assignment, and working conditions. The school library media center was included in SASS because the resources in public school library media centers help define the level of support beyond the classroom for student learning in the school. Private schools are less likely than public schools to have school library media centers, so private school library media centers were not included in 2011-12 SASS.

Public school districts were included in SASS as they set compensation, recruitment, retention, and retirement policies for traditional public school teachers and principals, therefore district representatives are the best source to answer questions regarding these topics. As school districts vary in size from very small to very large, either in the number of students or the number of schools, and those characteristics are an important context to school characteristics and policies, those data are also collected from school districts within SASS.

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The SASS survey design ensures that all of the related components are collected in the same school year and that, to the degree possible, the same data are collected for the public and private sectors. Data on principals or school heads, schools, and teachers are collected from both public and private sectors in the same way, unless a particular topic such as school choice is not applicable. Detailed data on private schools, private school principals or school heads, and private school teachers is unique to SASS. The SASS sample of public schools includes a large proportion of the nation's school districts as well, which allows for more equal representation of smaller school districts than by taking school districts as the primary sampling unit.

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SASS has a large sample of schools on average by state and for types of private schools, and also a large sample of teachers, as compared with other NCES surveys such as the Fast Response Survey System, also known as FRSS, or any of the longitudinal studies. The benefits of a comparatively large sample size are that data are available below the national level and are based on a diverse sample.

Geographic diversity and representation of both large and small schools guides the sample design of SASS. At the same time, care is taken not to overburden smaller states and schools. The SASS sample design balances the desire for robust estimates against the federal requirement to minimize the burden on survey respondents, as respondents provide their own data directly onto survey instruments.

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The SASS sample is not student-based and hence does not select schools on the basis of individual grade levels. Rather, schools are selected by overall grade ranges to be representative of primary, middle, high, and combined schools for public schools and elementary, secondary and combined schools for private schools. Combined schools are those with both elementary and secondary grade levels in the same school, such as 1 through 8 or K through 12.

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SASS seeks to collect data that are nationally representative of all public, private, and public charter schools in the nation. Additionally, SASS seeks to collect data directly from principals, school library media centers, and teachers within those nationally represented schools that can be used to describe the context of schools across the nation. Accordingly, the target population for the sample is defined as public schools, including public charter schools, and private schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The sample of public schools and public charter schools is drawn from the Common Core of Data, or CCD, administrative record files from two years prior to SASS data collection. The sample of private schools is drawn from the Private School Universe Survey or PSS, also two years prior to SASS data collection.

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The District Questionnaire and the district items in the School Questionnaire with District Items both cover enrollment size, number of teachers employed, and policies about recruitment and retention; as well as high school graduation requirements and school choice policies. The District Questionnaire is sent to every district associated with a traditional public school in sample, and to districts having jurisdiction over public charter schools. The School Questionnaire with District Items is sent to independent public charter schools that serve as their own school districts and to traditional public schools that are the only school in the district.

The District questionnaire is completed by a designated district official. A calling operation is performed ahead of the mailout of questionnaires to determine who to address the questionnaire packet to in the district office.

The District Questionnaire and the School Questionnaire with District Items can be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

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There are three versions of the school questionnaire. Traditional public schools receive the School Questionnaire. Private schools receive the Private School Questionnaire, which includes some additional items relevant to private schools. Public charter schools not under the jurisdiction of a school district and public schools that are the only school in the district receive a School Questionnaire with District Items that combines the school and district level items into one questionnaire.

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The school questionnaire asks for factual information about the school, its programs and services, the number of students served, and the headcounts of all school employees. The school's principal is requested to designate a school representative to fill out the school questionnaire and if possible to coordinate all of the school-level questionnaires.

The School Questionnaire, the Private School Questionnaire, and the School Questionnaire with District Items can be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

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Traditional public school principals and public charter school principals receive the Principal Questionnaire, and private school principals or school heads receive the Private School Principal Questionnaire. Both of these questionnaires cover principal preparation, attitudes about school conditions, compensation, and working conditions.

The Principal Questionnaire and the Private School Principal Questionnaire can be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

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Traditional public and public charter school teachers receive the Teacher Questionnaire. Private school teachers receive the Private School Teacher Questionnaire. These two versions cover the same topics, from teacher preparation and assignment, teaching workload, attitudes about conditions in the school, and salary, with a few minor differences between the public and private school teacher versions, such as for types of teacher certifying agencies.

Anywhere from one to about eleven teachers were selected for each sampled school, based on the school's size, to participate in the survey. Within each school, the sample of teachers is selected by general teaching assignment field, part-time or full-time teaching status, and the race ethnicity of the teacher. This relatively small proportion of a school's teachers is designed to be representative of teacher characteristics overall within a state or private school type, but not at the district, school, or classroom level.

The Teacher Questionnaire and the Private School Teacher Questionnaire can be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

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Traditional public schools and public charter schools receive the Library Media Center Questionnaire. This questionnaire asks a school-based respondent, often the librarian, to report on the services offered, provide headcounts of staff and volunteers, and recent expenditures, as well as library policies.

The Library Media Center Questionnaire can be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

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This is a data table from the SASS/TFS Table Library. The table shown here is Table 2 from the 2011-12 SASS School release report. Now let's focus on just a few things within the table. Here we can see school-level data for public schools, public charter schools, and private schools regarding the percentage of students with an individual education plan or IEP because of special needs or formally identified disability. In this example, data from traditional public, public charter schools and private schools were combined to generate an overall national estimate of the percentage of U.S. schools that serve students with disabilities.

Because of the SASS sampling design, and the inclusion of both public and private sector schools, it is possible to generate national estimates of school, principal, and teacher data. In this example the data show national estimates of public and private schools enrolling students with special needs and public and private schools enrolling English language learners.

All data from the public schools file are representative of all types of public sector schools, both traditional public schools and public charter schools, across the United States. Data from the private schools file are representative of all types of private schools across the United States. The combination of public school and private school files will yield estimates that are nationally representative of all types of elementary and secondary schools in the United States.

Estimates generated from both the public and private sector require merging data files, which will be discussed in the module titled, "Considerations for Analysis of SASS Data."

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This data table from the SASS/TFS Table Library (and from the 2011-12 SASS Teacher release report) shows public sector teacher data on the average hours that regular full-time teachers spend in the classroom, the school, and overall hours spent per week on teaching-related activities. The data in the three columns at the right come from the Teacher Questionnaire items 54, 55, and 56. The first two columns are from item 1 but only for the first response category of "regular full-time teacher" and the percentage of response categories 1 through 4 (all eligible types of teachers in the school). The term "regular full-time teacher" refers to teachers who have regular teaching assignments (as opposed to being specialists such as music teachers) and full-time refers to being employed as a full-time teacher rather than being in a part-time position. Measuring the average hours spent per week by including teachers who are not regular full-time teachers would change the meaning of an average work week.

In this example, not all teachers participating in SASS were included in the data results. Note that data analysts can determine the population of interest, such as only regular full-time public school teachers, for their own research.

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This example shows data from the Private School Questionnaire, by private school type or the 11 affiliation strata. These estimates are the most disaggregated results possible from SASS for private schools, the lowest level to which the data can be reliably reported. Note that there is one affiliation group with no data results; NCES does not release data results when the sampling variance is too high or the participation rate of a particular group falls below NCES statistical standards.

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This module has provided an introduction to SASS. It has provided basic information about the survey's target population, sample and survey design, and data collection rounds, topics, sources, and methods. This module has also highlighted the types of estimates that can be generated from SASS. Additionally, important resources that have been provided throughout the module are summarized here along with the module's objectives for your reference.

The subsequent SASS training modules contained within this system will prepare you for running data analyses from the 2011-12 restricted-use data files or obtaining data from published reports or PowerStats. The modules also discuss some of the topics presented within this module in greater detail.

You may now proceed to the next module in the series or exit the module.